

THE NAKED TRUTH



avid Zucker is a busy lad these days. Gone are the years when he and his brother Jerry scrounged for money to make *Flying High*; now he has to really work for a living. "If I sound tired it's because I'm exhausted following all

The Naked Gun hoopla. I'm still trying to find my desk in my office." The 'hoopla' as he calls it seems to be worthwhile, because the film has surpassed the original in terms of its box office success. "Most studios reckon a sequel normally does 60% of the original's business, so Paramount is pretty excited about how the new *Naked Gun* is doing," observes young Mr. Zucker from his Los Angeles office.

The genesis for *Naked Gun* and the loony adventures of Frank Drebin took shape some ten years ago in the guise of a short-lived TV series, *Police Squad*. It only lasted 6



From the brother of the director of the *Ghost*, comes Hollywood's first environmental comedy and no one is safe.

***The Naked Gun 2 1/2* opens this month and Paul Fischer spoke to the man responsible for it all, a very serious David Zucker.**

episodes, but Zucker understands why. "I think it was really wrong for television. I think it should have been a movie in the first place, because on TV you need a laugh-track. For our kind of material we can't allow a laugh-track because we don't like to admit that it's funny. Leslie Nielsen goes about his merry way, and if *you* think it's funny that's your own opinion; we can't tell anybody outright that it's funny by putting on a laugh-track.

The other thing is, we discovered that on television, people really don't pay attention like they do when they're in a movie theatre. When something's on TV and somebody is home, the phone rings, you're talking to somebody next to you, you go to the fridge for a beer and it's a completely different viewing experience than it is in the movies. I believe that our material requires a huge movie screen and people seated facing the screen in a darkened room."

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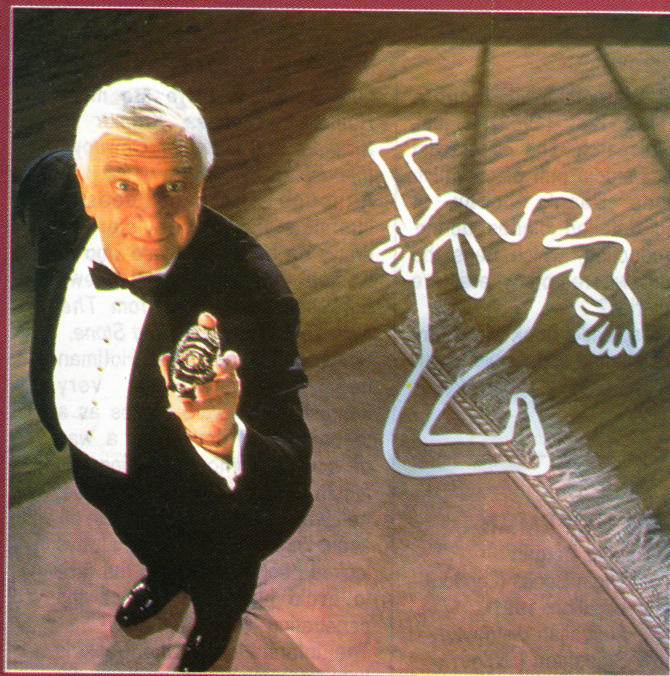
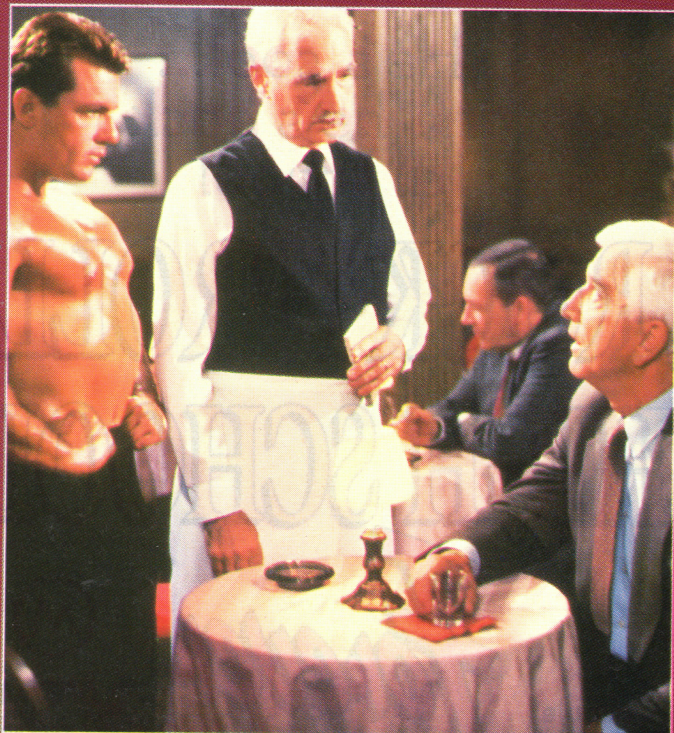
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Zucker recalls that he always wanted to make a big budget comedy. He got his wish and following his co-directorial efforts on *Ruthless People*, he directed *The Naked Gun* with his brother Jerry and former partner Jim Abrahams. David was not at all surprised when the first film emerged as the success it ultimately became. "We did it in the first place because we had so much confidence in the material; the original TV show really made us laugh. We used to show the series in front of test audiences in a cinema and they laughed, so we knew that the material was good."

Was it inevitable that there be a sequel to *The Naked Gun*? "It didn't seem like that at the time, although we knew it was possible, but I guess it was a natural that Frank Drebin could get involved in more than one story-line." In *Naked Gun 2 1/2: The Smell Of Fear*, Drebin is on the trail of some anti-environmentalists set to deprive the planet of alternative energy.

What was important for Zucker, however, was ensuring that in doing a sequel to the hit comedy, he didn't repeat himself. "We always watch serious old movies and television shows, and there seems to be an endless supply of new material and situations that Drebin can get involved in. In this kind of genre, you just don't run out of material. We can have Frank Drebin any place we want, whether it's a baseball game, a big press conference or the White House; there's always a pompous figure around that he can deflate."

Writing comedy is not easy - just ask any comedian! David's original script of *Naked Gun 2 1/2* was 240 pages long; the final shooting script was half that. So how did he determine what to retain and throw out? "When you read it, you do get an idea of the flow and pace of the script and when you're reading you should be laughing at the jokes. A script should also be a page turner; in other words, you should really be following the plot along with the jokes. If



you're laughing, you should also care about what happens to the characters. The plot of what Drebin is trying to investigate has to make sense, even in a nonsense-style movie like *Naked Gun*."

In comparing the sequel to the original, Zucker admits that "the pace of the two is very much the same, and all the elements that you have to keep the audience's attention for 90 minutes are there." Zucker describes *Smell Of Fear* as being Hollywood's first environmental comedy, and while he pokes fun at these issues, the underlying ideas stem from the director's genuine concerns. "I have become interested in ecological issues over the last couple of years. I joined an environmental group and I learnt about some of the problems surrounding global warming, our oil dependency, the depletion of the Ozone layer and that the air pollution we have in LA is a serious problem. I've come to realise that a lot of that is largely unnecessary. We don't need to pollute the air as much as we're doing."

While David doesn't preach in *Naked Gun 2 1/2*, he hopes that once it comes onto video, kids in particular will get the message after repeated viewings. "In the cinemas, the message is pretty subliminal, but on video, kids tend to watch these things over and over, so maybe it will sink in."

At the moment, the film is getting more laughs than political and social commentary, which is how it should be. And as for Zucker, he and his brother Jerry have left Paramount, having signed a new 3 year deal with Columbia. "Paramount wouldn't come up with the deal we wanted so we signed this new one at Columbia," says Zucker. "The catch is, Columbia pays us more money, but we have to work our way up from the mail-room."

Will Frank Drebin return? "Most probably, but I don't even want to start thinking about that until at least September." The chances are, audiences won't see *Naked Gun 331/3* for at least 2 years. Never mind, David insists we'll love *Smell Of Fear*, and he's probably right.

The Naked Gun 2 1/2 opened nationally on September 12.